

Partners needed to collect toys

The agency is once again looking for partners in the community that are willing to collect toys and other gift items for the Adopt-A-Family gift room. The gift room is utilized by those families who are not publicly adopted; those adoptees are able to pick two to three new items per family member.

Previously, the agency worked with local department stores to host trees for collecting gifts but the number of partnerships dwindled over the years.

“We have found it is difficult for local management of a lot of the bigger chains to get approval from corporate offices to do fundraisers for small, local non-profits,” said Executive Director Nichi Seckinger. “So we are adapting by working with more local businesses, building on some relationships we already have that have proven to be successful, and expanding outside of retail-only businesses.”

There are several ways for a business or organization to be involved in the gift collection program, including:

- Discount-based collections offering discounts or free services for a toy donation
- Employee-based drives for smaller companies that would struggle with adopting entire families
- Customer-based drives allowing customers to purchase items that can be collected by agency staff

Agency staff will work with businesses to tailor-fit to their individual needs and goals. In addition to picking up donated items, other materials, such as trees, collection containers, and printed materials, can also be supplied by the agency.

“Without community support, the gift room would have nothing to offer families who are not publicly adopted,” Seckinger said. “So building these relationships and ensuring gift room inventory is essential to the program.”

Anyone interested in collecting toys through their office or sponsoring a tree at their retail location, can contact the office at 816-364-1131.



Agency ends Thank You postcard mailing

Because of unresolvable expense issues associated with printing and postage, it has been determined that agency-facilitated “Thank You” postcards will no longer be sent to adopters from the families they select through the program.

We have considered many replacement options for the “Thank You” postcard system we had been using, however, the anonymity that many adopters chose has made many options non-feasible including online cards, or e-cards, and direct adopter/adoptee communications.

Many adopters will still receive cards and “Thank You” letters from the families they choose to have direct contact with. However, those who remain anonymous or do not share contact information with adoptees, will no longer receive agency-facilitated postcards from the gift recipients.

The agency will continue to mail its annual “Thank You” letters to all program participants; please do not mistake the lack of a postcard “Thank You” for a loss of appreciation. Our adoptees would not be able to celebrate the holidays without your generosity and we believe they sincerely appreciate all that is done for them.

In discontinuing this small part of the program, it allows the agency to better focus its funding on ensuring all applicants are provided for and that we are able to help as many as possible for the holiday season.

Small change can make big impact

A long-standing addition to the program, the Adopt-A-Family collection boxes allow individuals to donate a little at a time as they visit local businesses. They can be found in a variety of places, including grocery stores, boutiques, banks, restaurants, convenient stores, gas stations, auto repair shops, specialty shops, and even break rooms.

Over the years, more than 200 locations have hosted boxes and directly contributed to the program’s success. The agency is currently looking for new collection box locations for the 2021 holiday season.

Businesses are not asked to solicit customers for change; instead, we ask participants to leave the box in a highly-visible area that encourages donations. It is a no-maintenance investment for businesses, as the agency maintains the boxes and assumes all financial responsibilities.

The agency created the Master Elves traveling trophy in 2012 as a way to honor those who embrace the program and to encourage friendly competition. The staff at Casey’s General Store (22nd & Walnut) raised a record-setting \$2,500 for the program in three separate years. Now the trophy is awarded to the business that raises the most funds each year. Currently, Goetz Credit Union holds the trophy for their efforts during 2020, with \$567 collected.

Top Collectors

These top 15 locations raised nearly 60 percent of the total funds collected in 2020:

- 1st) Goetz Credit Union, Howard St.;
- 2nd) Green Hills, King Hill Ave; 3rd) Casey’s General Store, 22nd & Walnut; 4th) Brothers Market, St Joseph Ave; 5th) Crumbly Burger, Frederick Ave; 6th) Imperial Gas, S 6th St; 7th) City Star, 22nd & Frederick; 8th) Sav-On Furniture Mart, N Belt Hwy; 9th) Interstate Batteries, N Belt Hwy; 10th) Little Caesar’s Pizza, Mitchell Ave.; tied for 11th) Security Bank of Kansas City, Lower Lake Rd.; Casey’s General Store, N Woodbine; 12th) Brothers Market, Savannah, MO; and Zip Thru, SE US Highway 169; tied for 13th) Little Caesar’s Pizza, Ashland Ave.

We thank these businesses for their continued support and exceptional efforts. Anyone interested in hosting a collection box in their location(s) can call 816-364-1131 for more information.

AFL-CIO Community Services
1203 N. Sixth St.
Saint Joseph, MO 64501

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AFL-CIO
COMMUNITY SERVICES
PERMIT NO. 76

AFL-CIO Community Services

Fall 2021

Important Adopt-A-Family Dates to Remember

NOVEMBER

- Nov 1 — Adopt-A-Family applications available to adoptees
- Nov 17 — Adoption applications ready for review for adopters
- Nov 25 - 26 — Thanksgiving Holiday, offices closed

DECEMBER

- Dec 1 — Last day adoption applications accepted
- Dec 8 — Radio Telethon with Q-Country 92.7
- Dec 9 — Last day to deliver gifts to AAF offices
- Dec 15 — Gift Room set-up V Shopping Day for nursing home residents & disabled adults V
- Dec 17 — Gift Room opens V
- Dec 21 - 22 — Deliver gifts to elderly & disabled adults V Nursing home staff picks up gifts from agency
- Dec 23, 5 pm — Conclusion of AAF program (tentative)
- Dec 25 - 30 — Christmas Holiday, offices closed
- Dec 31 — New Year’s Eve Holiday, offices closed
- Jan 1 — New Year’s Day Holiday, offices closed

V — volunteers needed If you would like to volunteer for any of these projects, please call 816-364-1131 and ask for Becky. Volunteers are needed daily from December 15 through noon on Christmas Eve (except Sundays).



Help Me Headlines



AFL-CIO Community Services

Fall 2021

1203 N. 6th St.

St. Joseph, MO 64501

816-364-1131

www.helpmenow.org

Food vouchers now program staple

What started as a temporary solution in response to COVID protocols, food vouchers will permanently replace food baskets for the Adopt-A-Family program.

As a part of the program for more than 25 years, steps had to be made in 2020 to ensure COVID issues did not prevent the traditional distribution of food baskets. To avoid unnecessary contact with food or recipients, the voucher idea was born. This temporary solution proved so successful, it was decided vouchers would permanently replace the boxes of food formerly distributed to families.

This new process has proven itself beneficial in many ways: 1) it ensures the food received is as fresh as possible; 2) adopters and recipients do not have to haul heavy boxes of food; and 3) recipients are now able to choose from a variety of options for some food items. The voucher option also provides a much longer sale period; vouchers can be purchased until Christmas Eve. Families then have until Dec. 30th to fill the voucher, so food can be used for Christmas dinner, New Years, or be used to stock families’ pantries.

For adopters wanting to include food, vouchers can be purchased through the agency, either in person or by phone, in two sizes – small, \$60 and large, \$80. Vouchers can then be delivered to the family by adopters; kept with gifts delivered to the agency; or filled by adopters before delivery.

For more information or to place a voucher order, call 816-364-1131.

First Christmas without Adams at helm

Dear Friends,

It’s been an incredible couple of years for Adopt-A-Family; 2020 saw a change to many standard processes used to keep the program running smoothly during a pandemic. For 2021, the agency will complete its first program year without former director, Penny Adams. A part of the program since its inception, Adams’ spent the past 38 years fashioning a program that could almost administer itself. Thankfully, the agency has a group of experienced staff and volunteers who are more than capable of getting the job done. (Just to be safe, we also have Penny’s phone number on speed-dial.)

Because of the continued threat of COVID, and the need to protect both participants and volunteers, it has been determined the processes developed for 2020 will have to be utilized again this year. These steps include alterations to the following processes:

Applications - forms will be available online and at the agency to be filled out off-site; when paperwork is returned, the process will be completed by phone.

Types of donations - While the program has always stressed the need for AT LEAST one new gift per person in the household, because of potential contamination issues, ALL ITEMS donated to the families MUST BE NEW.

Donations - For those who want to donate but prefer to avoid public shopping, gift cards can be donated for families, and would be equally appreciated. Gift room donations and adopter drop-offs will be contactless when possible. Monetary donations can be made online, and by mail or phone for those who would rather avoid coming to the agency.

Food vouchers - these will permanently replace food baskets; see related article at left.

Gift room - Adoptees will be required to wear masks and gloves while shopping in the gift room. Gift room days will be extended to provide fewer shoppers per hour and provide for any necessary sanitation steps.

Delivery of gifts dropped at agency - adoptees will be required to wear masks when collecting gift items from the agency; all senior gifts MUST be delivered to the agency no later than Dec 17 to ensure items are delivered in time by agency volunteers and nursing home staff.

Every year it takes creativity and tenacity to get this job done in just 10 short weeks. We have never had a year where an applicant was not served; I have no doubt this year will be any different. Adopt-A-Family has succeeded despite the many obstacles that have come up over the years - floods, a pandemic, nasty winter weather, and changes in leadership. It has succeeded because the most essential part of this program has never wavered: Adopt-A-Family has always had the support of people like you.

Nichi
Nichi Seckinger, Director

Getting involved with Adopt-A-Family as easy as 1 — 2 — 3

Adoption — If you choose to adopt a family or individual through the program, you will be able to experience firsthand the excitement of shopping for each family member and meeting the adults when delivering their gifts. (Or we can make the deliveries for you if you'd rather be anonymous and have Santa take the credit.) Gift cards can also be given as gifts if preferred.

Monetary Donation — If holiday time is at a premium or funds are limited, another option is making a monetary donation. This donation will be used to purchase gift cards and provide gifts for those who are not adopted by an outside adopter. Donations can be made on our website at helpmenow.org or by calling 364-1131. We accept debit and all major credit cards.

Donation Items — Donations of NEW clothing, toys, stocking stuffers, hygiene products and household items are placed in our gift room for applicants to shop for family members. NEW items can be dropped off at our offices after Nov. 1. Items may also be dropped off at participating businesses and later collected by an agency representative. (See article on pg. 2 for additional details.)

Don't forget Christmas Dinner

In addition to holiday gifts, food vouchers make a wonderful gift for the families that apply for adoption during the holiday season. The agency has food vouchers available for purchase throughout the 2021 program. A large voucher can be purchased for \$80 (up to 6-8 people) and a smaller version (up to 4-6 people) will be available for \$60.

Amounts vary based on voucher size, but will include the following: a turkey or ham, potatoes, canned vegetables, stuffing, butter, rolls, fruit, and some type of dessert, which may be cookies, pie or candies. For additional information about food voucher options, please contact the office at 816-364-1131.



ADOPT-A-FAMILY FAQs

Q How does the family selection process work?
There are several steps. First, you should determine the number and type of family(ies) you are interested in — elderly, single-parent, large family, disabled — characteristics important to you. Secondly, come to or contact our office by fax, phone, website or email, and we will provide a variety of applicants who meet your criteria. Step three is selecting family(ies) and getting your choices back to us as soon as possible. Please keep in mind each family under your review will not be shown to other adopters. Your quick response makes it possible for us to get all the families adopted. Once your decision is made, we will need to know a few basic details, such as delivery information and type of assistance you're providing.

Q How much does it typically cost to adopt a family?
The amount spent on each individual is completely up to you. A good estimate is \$50 for children under 5; \$75 to \$80 for children from 5 to 12; and \$75 to \$100 is common for teens.

Q What type of gifts should be given?
The agency has changed its policy regarding gifts. Due to quality issues, ONLY NEW ITEMS can be given to families. Any family given used items by adopters will be asked to return items to the agency and will be allowed to shop in the gift room. The only exception to this rule is a prior understanding/conversation between adopter and adoptee.

Q Do I buy for everyone on the list?
There are no buying requirements for the entire family, however we ask that every child is given items. (Many parents will indicate they do not want/need gifts.)

Are you a thrifty shopper?

Put your bargain-hunting skills to good use by buying much-needed, teen-related items for our gift room. The gift room gets a large number of gifts for young children, but struggles with providing enough for teens age 13 to 18.

Cologne, DVDs, earbuds, gift cards, phone cards, video games, throw blankets, jewelry, hair products, hygiene sets, purses, wallets, sports items or tennis shoes are all good gifts to purchase for this under-provided group.

Q Do I have to buy all items on the list?
Not at all. Some items on the list are included strictly to offer additional gift ideas, such as kitchen or bathroom items, that might be needed by the family. There is no requirement to buy those.

Q Can I meet the family I adopt?
After you chose your family, you are welcome to contact them directly to make arrangements for a COVID-safe delivery. If they are willing to meet (and most are), you can work with them on a date and time.

Q What if I have questions about the family's gift list?
You can call the family directly or call our agency if you'd rather be anonymous and we will contact them. (Please be sure to speak with an adult, as some do not tell their children they are being adopted.)

Q What if I can't reach my family?
Many times families do not have a phone or they may lose service. If you cannot contact them through the message

Former adoptee experiences

There are four basic types of applicants: seniors and disabled adults; families who constantly struggle with poverty; paycheck-to-paycheck households who just cannot afford the additional holiday costs; and families or individuals who find themselves in a disaster situation (fire, loss of job, illness). Yet each also carry their own, unique story and situation.

Family in disaster situation: Martin and Regina have five children. In September Regina left her job because of a family emergency; their daughter had to be taken to a St. Louis hospital to wait for a double lung transplant. As a carpenter, Martin was the higher wage-earner but COVID cut his hours and he was laid off after September. Martin remained home with their other four children; the separation was difficult for the entire family. At one point, the remaining family were able to go to St. Louis. Once there, the entire family, including Regina, were exposed to COVID. The couple and four of the children had to quarantine in a hotel room; everyone in the family ended up getting the virus and were unable to see their hospitalized child for two weeks. COVID only compounded the income issues they were experiencing, and made planning for Christmas impossible. They applied in hopes of giving their children something good at the end of a stressful year for the family.

Q Do I have to wrap all the gifts?
We find wrapping the gifts should be determined on a case by case basis. If the parents are planning on using the gifts as something from Santa, many times they like them unwrapped. On the other hand, some parents enjoy surprise gifts they might be given. Generally, elderly recipients like unwrapping gifts. We suggest talking to your adoptee to help you decide.

Q How do I know they aren't getting help somewhere else?
All regional organizations that sponsor a holiday program report to our agency; we have a database that tracks all adoptions. If we find a family applied with more than one agency, they have to select one program

Senior/Disabled Adults: Dana and Todd have been married for 40 years; they are now living in senior community housing. Todd has stage-four kidney disease and is diabetic; Dana had COPD, leaving her on oxygen at all times. The couple does not get out, except for doctor appointments, which are frequent and draining for them. Dana applied for the couple to be adopted because she is worried it's Todd's last Christmas and she wanted to give him a nice holiday. Like so many of the seniors and disabled adults who apply, most of the items the couple requested were basic items: undergarments, household cleaning products, personal hygiene items, and a few clothing items.

Barely getting by: In the past several years, there has been an increasing trend among applicants: grandparents raising grandchildren on fixed incomes. For many of the grandparents, their struggle of supporting several people on a limited income is compounded by personal illness or grandchildren with disabilities and other issues. For instance, **Trina and Mitchell are raising their grandson** while relying on their disability income to cover

all of the bills and the money usually runs out before basic necessities are bought each month. **Melody is on disability and raising her two grandchildren.** Her grandson is autistic, and has hearing, speech and language disabilities. Her limited income not only covers food, clothing, and utility costs for three, she also has to find the funds to provide gas to cover frequent medical appointments her grandson requires. **Jane has similar issues;** she is going through dialysis as she raises her two grandchildren. She can barely pay bills and there is nothing left at the end of each month. Also disabled herself, **Tara is supporting her three grandchildren** and another child who was placed with her by Buchanan County Children's Division. While the children are relatively healthy, all are recovering from stressors from before they lived with their grandmother; the child she took in had never celebrated a holiday or birthday - she is 12 years old.

These situations are becoming commonplace and placing additional strain on our aging population, preventing them from building any kind of savings or emergency funding and forcing them to survive on a day-to-day basis.

or it is determined for them. Any fraudulent actions result in immediate removal from the program.

Q What if my budget doesn't cover the family I'm interested in?
You are welcome to find someone to partner with to provide for the family, or we can do it for you. We may be able to find a separate party to provide food or additional household items that are remaining.

Q Can I participate anonymously?
Yes. You can select a family, shop for them and bring the items to our office to be delivered. Families are not given

information about anonymous adopters.

Q If I don't have enough time to shop can I still help a family?
You can shop for general items and bring them to our agency, where we will try to match them with a family or add the items to our gift room inventory. You can also make a monetary donation to help purchase gift cards and food vouchers. Food vouchers include items for a Christmas dinner and can be purchased for \$60-\$80, based on size.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY CHRISTMAS PROGRAM HOW TO ADOPT A FAMILY OR INDIVIDUAL

Adopters have a variety of options. Families with children, adult individuals, senior citizens or multi-generation families are available and adopters can select as many families as they would like. Once the type of family has been determined, adopters review info sheets for several families fitting the criteria. Info sheets include clothing, shoe sizes and other items on each family member's wish list. Reviews can be done by email, fax, at our office or by mail. Families will be available for review starting **Wednesday, November 17.** After reviewing, adopters should notify the agency which family(ies) they would like to adopt.

If adopting a family with children, we ask adopters to provide NEW gifts for each child. If adopting a young child, preferably one gift would be a toy. Gifts for the parents are at the adopter's discretion. Family holiday food basket vouchers are also available. **(Please note on the application if the family requested food.)** If adopting an individual or a senior citizen, we ask the adopter to provide either a gift or food. Adopters determine how much more they would like to provide.

Adopters have the option of giving gifts, gift certificates and/or holiday food basket vouchers. If gifts — adopters shop for the gifts. (Wrapping gifts is optional.) If giving gift certificates or holiday food vouchers — they can be purchased privately by you or through our agency. Our agency will have holiday food basket vouchers available throughout the 2021 program for **\$60-\$80 each.** A food basket consists of the traditional Christmas dinner food items.

You are welcome to make contact with the family to let them know of the adoption. They should be able to provide any additional information needed. It is also good to set a time and date for delivering gifts in a COVID-safe manner. Adopters can also choose to remain anonymous. If adopters choose anonymity, gifts should be delivered to our agency no later than **Thursday, December 9.** Our staff will contact the family to make delivery arrangements.

If you would like to make your selection in person, please visit our office from 9 am to 5 pm beginning **Wednesday, November 17.** (If you intend to make your selection in person, **DO NOT COMPLETE THIS FORM.**) If you prefer to make your selection digitally, please provide the following information. Upon completion, please email, fax or mail the form to our agency. We will then send you a variety of information sheets to review.

Today's date _____ Date info needed by _____
Send info to me by: Email Fax Mail
Name: _____
Organization/Department: _____
Address: _____ Box # _____
City & Zip: _____
Phone: Work _____ Ext _____ Cell _____ Home _____
Email Address _____ Fax: _____ Work or Home _____
I plan to adopt a total of # _____ families.
I want to review the following types of families:

- Family - # of children - _____ Ages - _____ (ex: 5-15 yrs; infant; any)
With the following Parents - One Parent Both parents
- Adults - # of individuals - _____ Male Female Both Veteran
- Seniors - # of seniors - _____ Male Female Both Disabled

Upon reviewing the info sheets and selecting a family(ies), please have the following information:

- What is being provided for the family: toys, clothing, food, gift certificates, etc.
- If supplying food, will it be purchased from agency? Will the food be delivered to family or through agency?
- If supplying gift certificates, will they be purchased through the agency? What is the dollar amount?
- Will gifts be delivered to the family or agency?

AFL-CIO Community Services
1203 North Sixth St. St. Joseph, MO 64501
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